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TO : [redacted]

DATE: 27 Feb 75

FROM : [redacted]

SUBJECT: Detroit Free Press clipping (2/13/75)

Attached is clipping regarding [redacted] STAT [redacted] + agency — the Cole clipping was not seen by [redacted] STAT

THE DETROIT FREE PRESS
13 Feb. 1975

EX-CIA AIDE CHECKED

Congress Probes Monitoring of Mail

BY SAUL FRIEDMAN
Free Press Washington Staff

WASHINGTON — A former Central Intelligence Agency official who runs the U.S. Postal Inspection Service has come under the scrutiny of congressional committees investigating allegations that the CIA and other intelligence agencies monitored [illegible] mails of American citizens.

William J. Cotter, 54, the chief inspector of the Postal Inspection Service, was in the CIA for 18 years before assuming his present post early in the first Nixon administration.

Sources in the Postal Service say Cotter, who was a senior official in the CIA's Office of Security, brought with him to his new job at least one other agency veteran, now holding a high administrative position. His identity could not be learned and postal officials declined to disclose the backgrounds of top personnel.

The Postal Inspection Service, under Cotter, is in charge of providing legal "mail coverage" — monitoring the mails — for law enforcement and intelligence-gathering agencies.

ON OCCASION, ACCORDING TO a Postal Service source, mail coverage has been provided for the CIA. But because the CIA is legally prohibited from engaging in domestic spying, the source said, "the requests often come in from other agencies, like the FBI or the military intelligence people, acting for the CIA."

Congressional sources confirmed that the CIA often works through "cover" agencies to maintain "deniability."

Through a spokesman, Cotter declined to talk about the mail cover operation "because the matter is under congressional investigation and the Postal Service is co-operating with the investigators."

The spokesman explained, however, that mail coverage — which consists of recording the names and addresses from the faces of envelopes going to or coming from persons or groups under investigation — is legal when requested by a law enforcement agency and authorized by Cotter.

But the Watergate committee heard evidence that Cotter and his predecessors permitted "covert coverage," which is illegal. This means screening and examining mail with special devices or opening it. According to the Postal Service, opening or delaying the mail is illegal and no court orders or warrants to do so are permitted under law.

However, in June 1970, when then White House aide Tom Charles Huston proposed his plan to increase domestic spying, he suggested "covert coverage."

"Covert mail coverage," Huston said, "also known as 'sophisticated mail coverage,' or 'flaps and seals,' entails surreptitious screening and may include opening and examination of domestic or foreign mail."

ALTHOUGH COVERT COVERAGE had been temporarily discontinued at the time of his memo because of congressional hearings, Huston said, "high-level postal authorities have, in the past, provided complete co-operation and have maintained full security of this program.

"This technique (covert coverage) involves negligible risk of compromise. Only high echelon postal authorities know of its existence, and personnel are highly trained, trustworthy and under complete control of the intelligence agency."

The Huston plan, which was approved by President Nixon in July 1970, was withdrawn after five days because of opposition from then FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover.

However, evidence assembled by the Senate Watergate committee and the House Judiciary Committee showed that th Nixon administration pursued its domestic spying activities through other groups working closely with the White House.

Huston noted in his proposal that he had the support of the CIA.

CIA Director William Colby recently acknowledged that the agency formerly engaged in illegal domestic surveillance, but insisted that it "was not massive," as some news accounts have reported. Congressional investigators have been told that these activities have been going on since the 1950s.

AN IMPORTANT PART of the CIA in carrying out these domestic operations is the Office of Security, which was founded to protect the agency's personnel and facilities from infiltration. Former CIA Director Richard Helms has complained that it was difficult for the agency to avoid domestic activities because its Office of Security is charged with protecting the methods and sources of the CIA.

Cotter came to the Postal Service in April 1969 from a senior position in the CIA's Office of Security. In the agency he worked under Howard Osborne, Director of the Office of Security, who retired last June following disclosures that he had aided Watergate figures in securing illegal spying equipment and a psychological profile of Daniel Ellsberg.

Cotter has come under investigation because congressional committees looking into intelligence operations have information that the CIA gathered data on American citizens with the help of former agency officials now in other branches of the government.

Many governmental agencies, like the Postal Service, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Civil Service Commission and the Internal Revenue Service, have their own domestic intelligence operations and often employ former FBI and CIA agents.

A source on the House Post Office and Civil Service Committee said he had found no evidence that the Inspection Service had ever opened anyone's mail. But he expressed surprise that Cotter had been a CIA official.

A Post Service source said covert coverage "would be against existing policy, but where there's a will to do it, there's a way."

A spokesman said he had no knowledge of requests fo covert coverage. He added that the legal mail coverage was provided only when a local or federal law enforcement agency asks for coverage and shows evidence that a violation of law was being committed.

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